

Hand, foot and mouth disease

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common viral infection caused by a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. It is not related to the disease in cattle with a similar name (foot-and-mouth disease).

Symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease include tiny blisters on various parts of the body, including in the mouth, and on the fingers, palms of hands, buttocks, nappy area, soles of the feet, upper arms or upper legs. The blisters last a little longer than a week. The worst symptom is often the blisters in the mouth, which make it difficult for the child to eat or drink. In adults, the disease is rare and may cause mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

How it spreads

The virus can be found in saliva, mucus, faeces (poo) and blister fluid. It is usually spread from person to person through close contact, including:

- touching an infected person
- direct contact with blister fluid
- touching an object or surface that has been contaminated with the virus
- changing the nappy of an infected child.

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 5 days after infection. People are infectious for as long as the blisters contain fluid. Faeces can remain infectious for several weeks.

Exclusion period

Exclude until all blisters have dried.

Risks in pregnancy

In the vast majority of adults, infection is mild or asymptomatic. The risk associated with this disease during pregnancy is low; however, in extremely rare cases, it can cause miscarriage. If you are pregnant and become infected shortly before giving birth, the infection can pass to the baby. Most babies born with hand, foot and mouth disease have mild symptoms, but in very rare cases there are complications.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

If you suspect a child has hand, foot and mouth disease, call the parent or carer and ask them to pick up their child.

Ensure staff and children have good respiratory and hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Keep your child at home until their fever has stopped, they are eating and drinking normally and all blisters have dried.

Teach them to cough and sneeze into a tissue, then throw the tissue into a bin and wash their hands. If there are no tissues nearby, teach them to cough or sneeze into their inner elbow instead of their hands.

More information about hand, foot and mouth disease

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hand, foot and mouth disease (healthdirect.gov.au/hand-foot-and-mouth-disease).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.